

Sunday School

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

The Philippian Jailer.

July 11, 1909. Acts 16:25-40.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Acts 16:31.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 16:16-24. Th.—2 Cor. 12:1-10.
T.—Acts 16:25-40. F.—Daniel 3:19-27.
W.—1 Thes. 2:1-9. S.—John 6:37-47.
S.—John 3:9-17.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 63. Which is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

A Great Gospel Incident

A midnight prayer meeting in a jail. Vs. 25.

The jailer suddenly and soundly converted. Vs. 26-34.

The apostles honorably released. Vs. 35-40.

LESSON COMMENTS.

The Gospel prospered at Philippi and a number were converted, both men and women. But suddenly the work was endangered and a bitter persecution was provoked. The Gospel was brought into collision with the superstition of the heathen world and also touched the pockets of certain men in Philippi. They perhaps could have overlooked the triumph of Christianity over superstition, but they could not overlook a loss of gain.

A certain damsel, possessed of an evil spirit, followed Paul and the other Christians as they went through the city to the river side. The evil spirit recognized the ministers as the servants of Jesus even as they had recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God. This girl repeated her cries day after day, attracting the attention of Paul, but he prudently refrained from taking notice of it, not wishing needlessly to excite the enmity of those whom he wished to reach with the Gospel.

Paul was grieved, filled with compassion for the girl and indignation toward those who were making use of her. The Christians were being exploited for the private gain of these corrupt men. Neither did Paul wish that his Gospel should be forwarded by such evidence. Jesus forbade the demonsiacs testifying about him. He commanded the evil spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of the damsel and in obedience to this command, uttered in this name, he came out and the girl was restored to her right mind.

While her owners had been willing to reap the profit from her testimony concerning the apostles and profit by the commotion aroused, when the Gospel touched their purses and they saw that their gain was gone, they were possessed with violent rage and proceeded to take revenge.

They lay hands on the ministers and dragged them before magistrates. Note that they make no complaint about being deprived of their profit, because there was no law under which they could make such a charge, as the Roman law could not award damages upon a case of this kind where the girl had been restored to her normal state; but they make a charge of introducing a new religion, which offense was against the law of Rome.

In the twenty-second verse we have one of many examples of mob violence and hasty judgment on the part of the rulers. It is easy to stir the wrath of the populace, and, this wrath manifested, prejudices the judgment of the magistrates. Some of their fellow-citizens had been deprived of their source of income by a company of foreigners; a slave's prophetic powers had been taken away; and if they had been willing to pay money for the fortune telling of this girl, why should some outsiders be allowed to deprive them of what they wished? How familiar do these accusations sound to the ears of those who have found it necessary to attempt the correction of abuses whereby evil men have thrived on the weakness or credulity of others!

And, further, these men who dared to interfere with their customs were Jews, and they were breaking the laws of

Rome. They had not thought of the law until their anger was excited and they had suffered loss. The magistrates were only too quick to yield to the popular excitement and, without trial, ordered them to be scourged. We have reason to think that the punishment was no light one. After the missionaries had received many stripes, they were consigned to prison.

We should expect the ministers to be overcome by their sufferings and to be deploring the sudden calamity that apparently had closed their labors in Philippi, but instead Paul and Silas rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake, and they prayed and sang praises unto God.

"And the prisoners heard them." What must have been the effect on the minds of these miserable men? They probably knew the cause of their being cast into prison, they knew of the cruel scourging; what charm did these men possess that could make them sing praises while the blood was matting in the sores on their backs? What must have been their wonder when they felt the earthquake and saw the prison doors fall from their hinges? So great was their awe that it seems that none tried to escape.

When the jailer felt the earthquake and saw its effect, he would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped and knowing that his life would be forfeited; but Paul, knowing in what state of mind he would be in, called to him, "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here."

Calling for a light he rushed into the inner prison.

He fell down before them and then brought them out into a more comfortable place. It was then he asked the great question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This was a direct, pointed question, and it gets a direct answer. Paul gives him exactly what he asks for. This is the most important passage in the book. Heretofore Paul had been dealing with Jews who knew something of the religion of God, but this is the first recorded instance where the apostle comes into contact with a heathen who had none of the teaching of Jehovah, none of the prophecies, no knowledge about the Gospel. In answering this question we expect the apostle to tell him everything that was necessary for him that he might be saved. The simple answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." It is the one condition, but it is enough. They explained what this faith meant and spake unto them the Word of the Lord and to all that were in his house. The family had crowded around and the prisoners were listening and were awed, and in this dungeon, lighted by a rude torch, among unhappy prisoners, the first Church in Europe was formed among the Gentiles. The jailer believed, he and his household were admitted into the church by baptism, and we may confidently believe that some of these prisoners found liberty in believing in the Son, who could make them free indeed.

By morning a change had taken place in the minds of the magistrates. They sent word to the jailer, "Let those men go." But they were to find that they were not dealing with a set of cowards or with men who would cringe to their authority. Paul and Silas had been shamefully and unjustly treated; they had been publicly insulted and they were not willing to escape secretly. If they deserved their treatment, then let them remain in prison, but if their religion had been unjustly treated, let the magistrates make their reparation as public as their insult.

Paul therefore sends back word, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out secretly? Nay, verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out." These men had rights, and they did right in insisting upon them.

This was a high and dignified stand for the preachers to take and a stand which was of great advantage to the Church. The magistrates, hearing that these men were Roman citizens, were moved with fear and came and humbly besought them to leave the city. The stand of Paul brought these men to their senses and they humbled themselves before the men whom they had cruelly mistreated the day before.

But even now the apostles do not hastily leave, but first go to the house of their friends and give instructions, leaving the Church in the care of Timothy and Luke.

T. M. Hunter.